

Aging Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1176

AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR THE OFFICE OF THE LONG-TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN AND AREA AGENCIES ON AGING SERVICE

Title: NAVIGATORS.

Vote Date: 3/6/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 2/6/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Aging Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The legislation would provide funding for hiring one regional ombudsman for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman and funding for two additional service navigators in each of the five area agencies on aging. The Long-Term Care Ombudsman and service navigators provide an invaluable service to the residents of Connecticut, helping people get access to the services they need and ultimately saving taxpayers money in the long run. As it stands, the jobs this bill provides funding for are set to expire this year due to the ARPA funding for the positions running out. This bill seeks to save these critical jobs by providing funding for the positions going forward.

Joint Substitute (LCO 5877) specifies the amount of funding for hiring one regional ombudsman in section 1 and in section 2 specifies the amount of funding hiring five service area navigators for the five area agencies.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Dept. of Aging and Disability Services, Ms. Mairead Painter, Long-Term Care Ombudsman:

Her testimony speaks in **support** of this bill. The need for this program has never been more pressing and its expansion is an investment in safety, dignity and quality of care for those who receive long-term services and supports. Without additional regional ombudsmen the program faces challenges in effectively fulfilling its obligations by limiting the advocacy and support available to thousands of long-term recipients. Her testimony contains details of studies conducted that show the need for this support and concludes that the

funding is needed for ensuring the rights, safety and quality of care of long-term care recipients remains a priority in the state.

Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity, Mr. Michael Werner, Lead Aging Policy Analyst: Their comments were in **support** of this legislation indicating that implementing these investments could add a long-term benefit of saving the state money and resources through preventative measures before the escalation to law enforcement for issues that could have been mediated. "The community ombudsman program is a sound reinvestment into quality assurance to meet the booming demand for homebased and homemaker companion services, and protect older adults against senior fraud, exploitation, and abuse". They recommend that the legislature provide the funding requested.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

AARP Connecticut, Ms. Natalie Shurtleff, Associate State Director: Their comments were in **support** of this bill. The ombudsman and the area agencies of aging provide services for older adults and their caregivers, and they hope that funding for services and programs are continued and expanded.

Connecticut Legal Services, Ms. Jean Mills Aranha, Elder Law Attorney: The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) works to improve the quality of life and care of our state's residents who reside in nursing homes, residential care facilities and assisted living communities, as well as those who receive care at home. They point out that the number of calls and complaints that the LTCOP receives have increased in recent years and they hope that additional funding will help alleviate this trend.

Alzheimer's Association, Connecticut Chapter, Ms. Christy Kovel, Director of Public Policy: They submitted testimony in **support** of this proposal. Their comments mentioned that with the high number of nursing home residents who have Alzheimer's or dementia expansion of this program is needed to improve the quality of life for the residents. They believe that expanding funding for additional navigators is an investment that will help the growing number of adults who are living in the community.

Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home, Ms. Tracy Wodatch, President and CEO: They are in **support** of the effort to fund positions for an ombudsman and aging service navigators. They would like funding the system that ultimately that will be the care providers for those future needs. They mention that the home health care industry has been underfunded for many years and it continues to create difficulties as time goes on.

The Arc, Connecticut, Ms. Carol Scully, Director of Advocacy: They **support** increasing the funding for the office of the ombudsman and the additional service navigators. What they offer to people with disabilities is invaluable.

Aging Connecticut, Southwestern Agency on Aging, Ms. Marie Allen, President: They **support** this proposal pointing out that service navigators are an essential service for older adults especially in helping residents navigate the complexity of long-term care and community-based support.

Aging Connecticut, Ms. Maureen McIntyre, CEO: She submitted testimony in **support** of this bill. She included antidotal comments from people who had positive experiences with service navigators.

Statewide Coalition of Presidents of Resident Councils:

Ms. Jeannette Sullivan-Martinez, President

Mr. John Balisciano, Vice President,

Ms. Susan Bilansky, Exec. Board Member

They offer their comments in favor of this legislation. The ombudsman's presence and support make a real difference and they believe that expanding the program would give more residents access to the advocacy they deserve. The ombudsman is someone to turn to when they face problems related to care, facility conditions, or quality of life.

Ms. Beatriz Torres, Lead Service Navigator, Western Ct. Area, Agency on Aging: She **supports** this bill because she plays a critical role in helping people access services with complex systems and connect them with necessary resources. The service navigator position is the bridge that connects them to vital resources, such as healthcare, housing, legal assistance and in-home care programs. She urges the committee to prioritize funding for the service navigator positions.

North Central Area Agency on Aging, Ms. Joanna Bremmer, Finance Director: She offered her comments in support of this bill. She recently had a conversation with a man who related to her his experience with a service navigator and how they helped him with his own issue. She hoped that the bill would be favorably acted on by the committee.

Connecticut Council of Developmental Disabilities, Mr. Walter Glomb, Executive Director: He offered his comments in **support** of this legislation. He mentioned that changes to Medicaid and Medicare are coming, and they don't know what those may be but that we must ensure that Area Agencies on Aging have the capacity to process this increased demand.

Fairfield Senior Advocates, Mr. William Lenahan, Director of State Issues: Senior health care is a confusing and complex maze of issues, applications and resources for our senior community to understand. They request, with urgency for the committee to approve this bill which will help ensure the well being of many in our senior community.

Western Connecticut Area Agency on Aging, Mr. Spring Raymond, President and CEO: He asks for support for a \$2 million investment in the Service Navigator Program. The funding is included in line item in the Connecticut Dept. of Aging and Disability Services budget and will be critical in expanding services for older adults and their caregivers in our state. This funding would allow them to strengthen these programs for our older residents.

Fairfield Social Services, Ms. Julie DeMarco, Director: She offered testimony in **support** of this proposal. Her comments included a number of situations when their service navigators have worked with their department's social workers to help their residents.

Ms. Rachel Boxwell, Social Worker at UCONN Health: She offered comments sharing her experiences with working with the service navigator. She believes that this is a vital service,

and she hopes that the state will keep this in mind as it considers this bill and its future funding needs.

Family and Children Agency, Ms. Soraya Principe, Manager, Senior Services: She testified concerning the great help that the Service Navigator's provide. She **supports** this bill and a continuation of the funding and in increasing the number of service navigators from 2 to 4 per region.

Westport Senior Center, Ms. Wendy Petty, Director: She **supports** this bill and comments how their senior center relies on the service navigators feedback, guidance and advice on many topics.

Home Matters Caregiving, Mr. Matthew Scher and Ms. Asha Scher, Owners: They are in **support** of all efforts to improve care to senior citizens. They do suggest that the service navigators are essential for helping older adults.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None submitted.

**Reported by: Richard Ferrari, Assistant Clerk
Alexander Mercier, Clerk**

Date: 3/7/2025